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ABSTRACT

Strategies were identified to enhance the provision of Australian Adult Basic Education Services (ABES) for visually impaired adults and to provide an information sheet for further education workers indicating appropriate ways of interacting with visually impaired adults. The Eastern and Gippsland Regions were studied. In the Eastern Region, information on visually impaired adults was sought with regard to 13 considerations: extent of demands; number attending adult basic education and allied courses; special education resources available at colleges/centers; program flexibility; access to resource sharing; educators' perceptions; guidelines/information for educators; opinions/suggestions in regard to access; established networks; the manner in offering courses; frameworks and support systems needed for integration; barriers to access; and related costs to support systems. In the Gippsland Region, a broad overview was developed with attention to the implications of distance education and technological applications on visually impaired people. Four recommendations were made for adult basic education programs for the visually impaired: (1) effective strategies should enable and promote participation; (2) equal access should be provided commensurate with other community members to available technology; (3) specific locations should be designated in each region to facilitate access and participation; and (4) specific inclusion and opportunity should be ensured in initiatives. (The Disability Services Act of 1986 appears in an appendix. Strategies for each recommendation and 59 references are included.) (NLA)

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BASIC EDUCATION NEEDS

OF

VISUALLY IMPAIRED ADULTS

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Prepared by
Royal Victorian Institute of the Blind
for
the Adult, Community and Further Education Board
(Formerly the Division of Further Education)

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BASIC EDUCATION NEEDS

OF

VISUALLY IMPAIRED ADULTS

Research by
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1992

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and

appreciation of effort is extended to R.V.I.B. personnel and particularly

- Marley Bockhodt for typing
- members of staff for contributions
- library staff for assistance and co-operation

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles underpin this study:

- that persons with visual impairment are entitled to equality of access to education services and programs;

- that persons with visual impairment are entitled to opportunity of optimal participation in educational services and programs.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

See page 56 for recommendations and strategies.

Recommendation 1.

that the Division of Further Education devise effective strategies for enabling and promoting participation of persons with visual impairment and blindness in adult basic education and allied courses on an equitable basis.

Recommendation 2.

that the Division of Further Education devise effective strategies to ensure that there is access for visually impaired adults commensurate with other members of the community to available technology at venues of adult basic education and allied courses on an equitable basis.

Recommendation 3.

that the Division of Further Education initially designate specific locations in each region to facilitate access and participation of adults with visual impairment.

Recommendation 4.

that specific inclusion and equitable opportunity is ensured for visually impaired persons in proposed and current initiatives by the Division of Further Education.

OVERVIEW

Introduction

In December 1989, the Division of Further Education, Ministry of Education, Victoria, initiated and provided funding to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, for a research project relating to accessibility for adults with visual impairment to basic education, opportunity for participation, and basic education needs of visually impaired adults.

The particular focus was directed to accessibility for adults with visual impairment who had not proceeded beyond Year 10 in their education.

It was determined that the research would be conducted in the Eastern Region and with some limitations extended into the Gippsland Region.

In the Eastern Region, the educational centres targeted in the research project included T.A.F.E Colleges, Community Centres, Council of Adult Education, Libraries and the Adult Migrant Education Service. In an overview of the Gippsland Region, particular attention was given to technological applications for developing in the area.

Under the aegis of the Division of Further Education, and in consultation with Barbara Carter in D.F.E. Eastern Region, the project was managed by Margaret Fialides, Director of Library and Communication Services, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. Research was conducted by Norma McJames.

Purpose of the Project

- To prepare a report for the Division of Further Education clearly identifying strategies to enhance the provision of Adult Basic Education Services for visually impaired adults.

- To provide an information sheet for the Division of Further Education workers indicating appropriate ways of interacting with visually impaired adults.

- To compile a kit of existing material for co-ordinators.

Aims of the Project

- To ascertain and report on the extent of current demand by visually impaired adults for placement in Further Education programs and courses, in both formal and informal settings.

- To report on the ability of current provision to meet that demand.

- To prepare informative material relating to the condition of visual impairment.

- To investigate special mechanisms used to provide adult visually impaired students with special support related directly to their impairment and to document the effectiveness and cost of those mechanisms.

- To recommend to the Division what support is needed by visually impaired students and how that support can be provided given current resource constraints.

Context of the Research

The research was conducted in the context of reference to the Social Justice Policies of the Victorian Government, and the Disabilities Services Act 1986 of the Commonwealth of Australia.* (App.1)

An outline of the principles and directions for further action in encapsulated in the Report - Way Ahead: a positive future for Victorians with disabilities and their families, Community Services Victoria 1989. It emphasises the following:-

"The Victorian Government's commitment to Victorians with disabilities is guided by its Social Justice principles; equity or fairness in the distribution of resources, fair access to goods and services, participation and protection of rights, and by its commitment to uphold the provision of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 which makes it unlawful to discriminate against Victorians with disabilities.

The specific principles which will guide future action for Victorians with disabilities are:

1. Victorians with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other Australians and are entitled to privacy, confidentiality, choice, dignity and as adults, self determination and economic independence.

2. Victorians will not be discriminated against on the grounds of their disability by any organisation receiving State financial assistance or in respect of any program or activity operated by the State.

3. All Victorian regardless of type and severity of disability have a right to community support in the exploration of their full potential for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.

4. Victorians with disabilities are generally best served by access to services available to the general community, modified or extended where necessary.

5. Victorians with disabilities are more likely to have their needs met if they have opportunities to participate in planning and evaluation of programs, services, activities and legislation which affect their lives."

The Social Justice statement (Cain 1986) specifically refers to education: "... when we move to increase participation rates in secondary and post-secondary education, we want to ensure that those groups currently under represented, get improved access to those education places."

Adult literacy and basic education programs in Victoria aim to provide educational opportunities for adults wishing to increase their access to the normal range of post-compulsory educational programs, to improve their employment status and to enhance their participation in the community.

In this report definitive usage of 'Adult Basic Education' and 'Literacy' will be consistent with the report 'Adult Literacy and Basic Education into the 1990's Volume 1, Summary of Recommendations, Division of Further Education, Victoria.' 'Adult Basic Education' will refer to the range of courses and activities which have usually been covered under the title 'adult literacy and basic education.'

Literacy in the context of adult basic education in Victoria, will encompass all of the following:-

- Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking.

- It implies cultural knowledge which enables a person to recognise and use language appropriate to different knowledge contexts and social situations.

- Active literacy enables people to think, create and question, which is particularly necessary in an advanced technological society as Australia.

Policy Initiative in Adult Basic Education

D'Cruz (1989) encapsulates policy initiative in adult basic education as follows:

> As part of the 1988-89 initiative in adult basic education, the Government has provided for expenditure in the areas of research, curriculum, professional staff development and evaluation.
>
> In 1988-89, a sum of $2.5m was allocated by the Victorian Government, as a new policy initiative, to adult basic education across the State.
>
> Funds in the order of $1m have been allocated from this initiative to the Councils of Further Education to sustain and increase the range and variety of local programs available to the 400,000 people thought to need them.

> Funds have also been directed to ensuring that the provision of adult literacy and basic education programs in TAFE colleges and by the Council of Adult Education (through its workplace basic education project) continues and is enhanced.

The Division of Further Education directly funds programs or courses for adults which fall into three broad categories. Regional Councils are responsible for recommending the allocation of funds for the following areas:"

a. Programs which lead to or prepare for further education such as:
   - adult VCE
   - preparatory courses and bridging courses
   - adult literacy and basic education

b. Programs which lead to or prepare for employment such as:
   - return to work
   - pre-vocational programs

c. Programs which focus on personal development and self-esteem for specifically disadvantaged groups.

Carter (1989)

Provision of Adult Basic Education Programs

In the provision of adult basic education programs many of these programs are targeted towards disadvantaged groups identified as:-

- aborigines
- people with disabilities
- long-term unemployed
- people on supporting benefits
- elderly
- long-term migrants
- educationally disadvantaged

Current adult basic education programs are attempting to cater for a wide variety of student needs. Some programs have highly specific objectives, for example, preparation for further formal study at a particular TAFE College. Others have broad educational objectives, for example, developing general literacy skills, often conducted in community settings.

Adult basic education is provided in a number of settings and modes including work, community or institution based, and by correspondence, TOCCA or radio for long distance. *(see next page).

With the additional funds provided under the Government initiative, neighbourhood houses are increasingly becoming major providers of integrated further education and play a particularly important part in reaching disadvantaged groups in the community.

D.F.E. Publications.

Strategy and Tasks

For the purposes of this report, the following tasks were undertaken:

- Review of literature to select relevant material from reports and other publications.

- Preparation and distribution of survey and compilation of results of survey.

- Visitation to and consultation with personnel/educators at TAFE Colleges, Community Providers, Australian Migrant Education Service and Council of Adult Education.

- Consultation with personnel in the Division of Further Education.

- Visitation to libraries.

- Consultation with personnel at the Burwood School for Blind Children, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, to identify current trends and commonly used resources/methods in education of visually-impaired persons.

- Consultation with key personnel at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, and including group meetings with personnel engaged in community services, library services and resource counselling for students in education.

- Extensive phone contacts to service providers, field workers and other organisations.

- Compilation of information on distance education and developments of applications in technology.

Regional Focus of the Study

The two regions selected for this study were the Eastern Region and the Gippsland Region.

In the **Eastern Region**, information was sought from TAFE Colleges, Council of Adult Education, Community Providers, Adult Migrant Education Service, and libraries with particular regard to:

- extent of demands by adults with visual impairment
- number of adults with visual impairment attending adult basic education and allied courses
- special educational resources used by or available to people with visual impairment at centres/colleges
- flexibility of program and course delivery
- access to sharing of resources and potentially for gaining access to resources from other organisations
- perceptions of educators in regard to working with visually impaired adults
- guidelines/information for educators in regard to participation of visually impaired persons in education environment
- opinions/suggestions from co-ordinators in regard to the facilitation of access for adults with visual impairment into adult education courses and allied courses
- networks that have been established or have potential to be conducive to adults with visual impairment to attend classes

- the manner in which colleges/centres can offer courses to adults with visual impairment

- frameworks and support systems which are of significant benefit for visually impaired adults to enjoy full integration

- factors which act as barriers to access and participation by visually impaired persons in adult education courses

- consideration of related costs to support systems

In the **Gippsland Region,** a broad overview was proposed albeit particular attention was directed to the implications for visually impaired adults resulting from the developments in distance education and applications of technology.

Adult Basic Education Venues

TAFE Colleges

TAFE colleges are expanding their role to include training in the workplace, the broader use of college facilities and the more flexible use of college facilities.

Community Providers

Victorias' 400 neighbourhood houses and community learning centres offer courses in personal development, return to study, programs in literacy and basic maths, as well as a wide range of programs in crafts, languages, fitness, and the performing arts. Some serve a dual role of further education and community welfare and development, and as such are funded by Community Services Victoria as well as by the Division.

D.F.E. Publications

Council of Adult Education

The Council of Adult Education has a long-established place in Victoria as a provider of fee-for-service courses which include a wide range of learning experiences through classes in a variety of topics, creative workshops, summer schools, concerts, lectures and seminars. It has also become a sponsor for other programs connected with adult education, such as adult basic education and has provided physical accommodation for a number of networks and groups, and through its field officers it has given support for further education activities undertaken by other providers. The Council of Adult Education has a statutory link with Local Advisory Committees, which are providers of further education, especially in country areas and provincial centres.

Adult Migrant Education Services

AMES is the major provider in Victoria under the national Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) through which the Commonwealth Government provides resources for the teaching of English to adult migrants. Programs are planned and delivered in the context of a formal arrangement between the State and Commonwealth Governments and within the parameters of the AMEP National Plan (1990-1992) which has been developed by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs in consultation with all State and Territory AMEP providers.

D.F.E. Publications

EASTERN REGION

Factors which contribute to the effectiveness of the educative environment

Kimberley (1986) in a study on educational and vocational outcomes of attendance at a Community Provider venue, describes "vocational" in relation to factors including growth process, personal aspiration and discovery. Kimberley (1986) identifies factors deemed desirable in a setting for the discovery of goals in a vocational setting.

These factors can be seen to be equally important for visually-impaired and blind persons as well as other members of the community in an educative environment.

Kimberley (1986) identifies them as:-

- an appropriate environment
- a non-threatening atmosphere
- a communicative process
- a support system
- the context of a feeling of worth and confidence

An **appropriate environment** is one in which a person with visual impairment has access on an equitable basis to the resources and opportunities offered to other members of the community.

A **non-threatening atmosphere** should be one in which the student with visual impairment has no added dimension of apprehension and concerns compared with others, and should provide for an integrative environment.

A **communication process** should allow for a person with visual impairment to compete on an equitable basis with other members of the group.

A **support system** should be adequate to meet the additional and individual needs of a person with visual impairment which occur as a result of the condition.

A **feeling of worth and confidence** should not be undermined by factors in the environment of learning, and adequate opportunity to build on self-esteem and confidence should be commensurate with opportunities provided to others.

Community Providers

In this study, it was found that in the Eastern Region there has been little demand for adult basic education courses by adults with visual impairment, and there has not been adequate provision of support systems in the educative environments to enhance and promote the opportunity for participation on an equitable basis.

There are both similarities and pronounced differences in the historical development of community providers. Each and every community centre has an historical background and development, unique to the centre, which has determined, in varying degrees, function and direction.

In many cases, because of the particular community in which each centre has been established, services have been developed and tailored accordingly. However, not every centre reflects the demography in the area of location. In some cases a profile in particular services targeted to specific groups has contributed to the centre developing in a particular way.

Despite a similarity in goals, a different set of variables has come to influence the function of each centre, and the targeting of specific groups or the development of particular courses.

There were only a few centres where it was indicated that there are numbers of people with visual impairment participating in basic adult education and allied courses.

In one centre participants in allied courses reflected the demography of the area which features a high proportion of retired persons. Of those participants, there is considerable representation of community members who have concerns in regard to deterioration of eye sight.

However, some centres do not reflect the demography in the area of location. In another municipality in the Eastern Region, at a centre which has developed a high profile in also providing for high levels of need for persons with physical, intellectual and/or multiple handicaps, there were six participants identified with visual impairment in adult basic education and allied courses.

Although these two centres had staff who had gained experience in identifying needs, responses in our research indicated that staff in the majority of centres did not perceive themselves as having experience or specific knowledge of working with persons for visual impairment.

Participation by persons with visual impairment or blindness

Finding of this study is that the majority of community providers in the Eastern Region seldom have participation by persons with visual impairment or blindness in adult basic education and allied courses.

Typical of replies in our survey and in interviews were responses such as:

> "we have never had a request from any visually impaired person";
>
> "we have had no queries from the visually impaired";
>
> "we don't attract people with visual impairment";
>
> "up to date we have not offered any courses suitable for adults with visual impairment".

Many of the co-ordinators/staff in Community centres interviewed, indicated that they were unfamiliar with the needs of persons with visual impairment

A typical response referred to-

> "insufficient tutor training to understand the needs of visually impaired people".
>
> "We don't know what additional resources/support would be desirable; we need to be told by people who are in touch with needs of students".

A recognition of the inadequacy of provision of resources was reflected by responses such as:-

> "We have no facilities at all to cope with or assist a visually impaired person".

A willingness to response to the participation and needs of adults with visual impairment was exemplified in responses such as:

> "We would like to become involved in services and servicing visually handicapped people".
>
> "We would like to have sufficient resources to offer 'quality participation' for visually handicapped people".
>
> "We have no facilities at all to cope with or assist a visually impaired person ... would want that person to have the best equipment to assist in completing the course to their satisfaction".

Concerns were frequently espoused about financial constraints at centres. It was indicated that finance for additional resources for particular groups would need to come from the Division of Further Education, or sources other than community centres with budgets 'already overstrained'.

Positive responses to the provision of courses ranged from those co-ordinators who envisaged courses specifically for persons with visual impairment, to others espoused the advantages of networking in the exchange of resources, and integration.

> "We see a Community House as an appropriate place of offer literacy classes to visually impaired people as well as integration".
>
> "We are planning to network with visual impaired associations with the view of offering a literacy class for visually impaired students".
>
> "It is possible to get hold of suitable resources if you have good contacts".

One respondent concluded that:

> "If the need for such courses was identified we would endeavour to assist in this area".

Ideas put forward to increase participation by adults with visual impairment included:

"Advertising/publicity and equipment".

"Employ tutors who have had some experience in community education with reference to understanding the needs of visually impaired people".

"We would need equipment and support".

"Promoting our courses to organisations whereby visually impaired people may investigate the option further".

"Having sufficient resources to offer 'quality' participation for visually impaired people".

Indicative of responses in regard to resources/support perceived to be required for participation by adults with visual impairment included the following:

"trained and experienced staff/tutors; training/integration programs by community development worker; special equipment (interactive video etc)"

"additional resources/support"

"more paid co-ordination time to put into outreach work".

Other concerns that were individually expresses included:

"I feel that we don't attract people with visual impairment. This is likely to be due to lack of publicity and networking. I believe many things are possible through strong networking".

"The Education Department provides a peripatetic service for trained aids for visually impaired students. It would be wonderful if this could be extended to Further Education because this is the only way to give an equitable access to education".

"The few students we have in our program with a degree of visual impairment, we are able to incorporate into our 'normal' literacy groups. However, I feel that the large print books are a distinct advantage to any of our students in increasing their ability to read in a pleasurable way".

"Would like to become involved in services and servicing visually handicapped people, but we would like to discuss the issue with much more depth, with a variety of professionals and visually impaired people, so that (this centre) understands the needs of these people with much greater depth".

In addition to growth and development of community providers, there has also been enrichment and expansion of networking and outreach.

Community providers play an integral role in the regional networks

Personnel at a Community Provider Venue in the Eastern Region provided a sketch overview of the networking, linking of resources, and reciprocal interaction which has been developed at their centre. Many of the community providers have developed links of this kind (see next page).

It can be seen that benefits of exchange, and networking can optimise services, the use of resources, and information interchange.

Consideration could be given to the integration and exchange of resources in these networks which would also benefit adults with visual impairment.

A sketch overview of networks and linking of resources at a community venue.

Community Groups
hire rooms at
Community Providers

Tutor's room for
Skillshare

Secondary College
- Typing - equipment
  - teachers
- Computers
- Rooms
- Equipment

Library
Community
Room

Community Provider

Primary
School
Resources

Primary School after-school activities provided for children from this school at Community Providers

College of TAFE who run:
- outreach courses at Community Providers
- provide a library service, equipment and resources

Literacy skills affect many facets of life and are integral to effective social intercourse

As Levine (1986), cited in Hartley (1990), points out -

> "Literacy skills cannot be separated from the social and economic context in which they are practised and exercised".

Grant, (1987:11) cited in Hartley (1990) in reference to Adult Literacy Provision encapsulated the following:

> "the multiplicity of needs and contexts for adult literacy and basic education points to the necessity for a diversity of programs and a plurality of provisions".

It is appropriate for the needs of visually impaired and blind persons to be recognised in the context of diversity and flexibility to provide choices to individuals who have needs as a result of a visual condition.

The social costs of inadequate literacy have been well described by Hartley (1990:17). In viewing the compounding effects of inadequacy of literacy skills, one example that Hartley (1990) points to is that "the lack of literacy skills of one family member may lead to considerable dependence on another more literate member and to very uncomfortable imbalances in power".

If people with visual impairment do not have the opportunity to adequately develop and maintain literacy skills, it can be an additional burden to experience unnecessary dependency. However, whilst barriers exist that inhibit full participation in the community, then independence is not promoted.

TAFE Colleges

TAFE colleges provide both "technical" and "further" education.

In addition to their importance as providers of vocational training, TAFE colleges are, of course, vital in the delivery of further education programs. It has been estimated that up to 80% of further education courses are conducted through the TAFE network, which represents 33 colleges. In some colleges, further education courses constitute up to 30% of their offerings.

The Government has legislated through the Vocational Education and Training Act 1990 that a function of a TAFE College "is to provide the population of the area served by a college with efficient and effective technical and further education".

It is recognised that further education courses in TAFE colleges provide access to a range of educational training and labour market opportunities, often for people who have not had equal access to these pathways in the past. As such, this provision forms a vital part of the Government's social justice strategy.

(Further Ed. August 1990)

Box Hill TAFE offer 150 different courses which include-

- Associate Diplomas
- Advanced Certificates
- Apprenticeship Training
- Return to Study Options

in addition to training and qualifications in-

- Electronics
- Engineering
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Social and Community Services
- Business and Computing
- Other

Outer Eastern College of TAFE's main campus is in Wantirna South, and other campuses are located in Lilydale, Healesville and Croydon..

Many of the College's programs are also offered through community venues in the outer eastern suburbs, or a choice can be made to study at home by correspondence or "off-campus study".

Courses offered at Outer Eastern College of TAFE include-

- Full and Part-time Accredited Courses
- Business, Hobby and Personal Development Short Courses
- Off-camp[us (correspondence) Study
- Apprenticeship Training
- Training and Industry Programs.

Holmesglen College of TAFE has campus locations at Chadstone, Oakleigh and Brighton, offering a wide range of courses for school leavers, apprentices and adults, which range from pre-employment to Associate Diploma level.

The range of courses includes-

- Applied Science
- Access/Return to Study
- Communications
- Building and Construction
- Business Studies
- Computing
- Horticulture
- Industrial Skills
- Mortar and Allied Trades
- Plumbing and Construction Finishing

Conceding that TAFE colleges, in general, have an extremely large agenda to address, of which the needs of disadvantaged groups is but one, an earlier report (Jack Sach and Associates, 1988) with wider scope than this project referred to resources thinly spread, programs overly dependent on the individual efforts of some teachers, funding inadequate, initial teacher training minimal, staff development ad hoc, and the evaluation of college performance in the disability field generally non-existent (including an absence of data on basic issues, such as the number of students with disabilities).

Although there has been considerable endeavour in some areas of education directed to make the situation more equitable for people with disabilities, nevertheless, for adults with visual impairment, effective change appears to be by degree, rather than the implementation of cohesive strategies.

However, in the TAFE colleges there is considerable development in technology. Rapid advancement of the application of technology has permeated all levels of education including adult education, and hold significant potential for adults with visual impairment.

Innovations in technology, outreach programs and developments in distance learning are established trends in the hierarchy of education programs, but as yet, there has not been systematic scrutiny to identify feasible options in the use of resources to enable adults with visual impairment to share equitably in the benefits enjoyed by other members of the community.

Trends emerging in networks of educative systems, such as the use of multi-media and laptops (already available with speech access products, for example, Toshiba) will enhance opportunities for adults with visual impairment.

An awareness of the potential for visually impaired persons, and the implementation of appropriate strategies, can achieve and accelerate a more equitable participation for adults with visual impairment.

Access to Information via large print formats

Many individuals with visual impairment could access information via large print formats in contrast to small print in current usage.

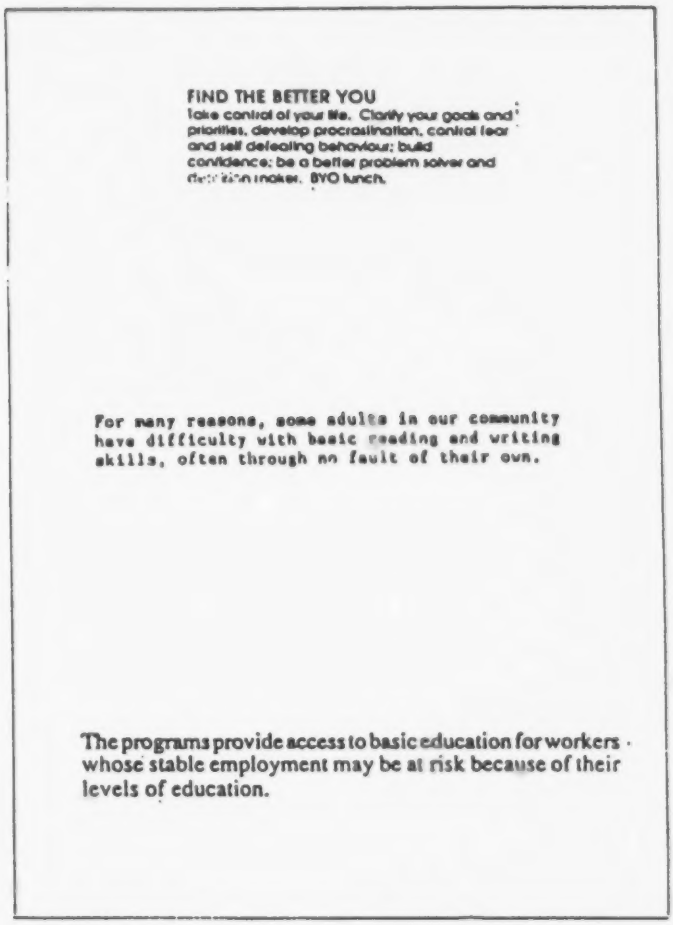
Although constraints of finances may be one factor which has resulted in fine print format in the dissemination of information about and in courses offered at TAFE colleges, community centres and CAE's, nevertheless there is no evidence to suggest that consideration has been given to an investigation of the feasibility of providing formats which allows access for visually impaired persons and blind persons in the same manner as other members of the community.

At the lowest level of needs resulting from a visual condition, the provision of large print format would enable participation of those who find it appropriate to meet their needs.

In public libraries in the Eastern region, there is a considerable monthly turnover of large print usage and cassettes, however, there is little to suggest that members of the community with needs of this kind are represented in adult basic education and allied courses.

A review needs to be undertaken to determine strategies and guidelines for appropriate formats which are feasible at the present time or can be incorporated in future time-line planning.

Although for some people large print may alleviate the difficulties caused by the condition, there should also be a progressive development of strategies for specialist formats to be incorporated in longer term systematic implementation.



FIND THE BETTER YOU
Take control of your life. Clarify your goals and priorities, develop procrastination, control fear and self defeating behaviour; build confidence; be a better problem solver and decision maker. BYO lunch.

For many reasons, some adults in our community have difficulty with basic reading and writing skills, often through no fault of their own.

The programs provide access to basic education for workers whose stable employment may be at risk because of their levels of education.

Samples of print size in current use for information about programs.

Barriers to Students

It has been identified in Adult Literacy and Basic Education into the 1990's, that **barriers real or perceived** to students entering adult basic education programs include:

- distance from provision
- unsuitability or inaccessibility of venue
- inconvenient time of provision
- competing demands on time
- fear of failure
- lack of awareness of provision
- poverty
- inappropriate program content and provision; and
- lack of child care.

Ms Sallyanne Tangney, Resource Consultant of RVIB, cited additional factors identified as barriers by students with visual impairment when interacting in an educative environment.

They include:

- lack of provision of information in the required format (tape, large print or braille, tactile or disc), at the appropriate time, for the appropriate class

- difficulty with "spontaneous" introduction of text or diagrams by the educator/teacher in an inaccessible format

- failure of staff/peers to acknowledge or understand the difficulties imposed due to the nature and degree of partial sight, as distinct from blindness (e.g. slower reading, mobility difficulties, social isolation, **apparent** coping ability)

- in both partial and total blindness, the abilities and practical strategies of the student may not give an indication of the severity or implications of the condition for example, as with tunnel vision or peripheral vision

- fear of being "singled out" or conversely not getting appropriate information in an appropriate format

- difficulty with room changes, and class excursions due to mobility

- difficulty with mobility to get even small distances.

Identification of Issues

Issues to be addressed include:

- strategies for the progressive implementation of the availability of the publication of information about and in programs in appropriate formats for visually-impaired persons

- provision of programs which are sufficiently adaptable in method and delivery to reasonably accommodate the requirements of visually impaired persons on an equitable basis

- development of strategies for flexibility of all aspects of participation in basic education to enhance access for visually impaired adults

- awareness programs and promotional activities to include and attract visually impaired adults in and to educational courses

- specific course of action to enable educators/co-ordinators and personnel to develop awareness and gain information about participation and access of visually impaired adults

- barriers that exist which impede or prevent participation

- the provision of guidelines and direction to enable the development of strategies, to assist in appropriate integration of visually impaired adults in basic education

GIPPSLAND REGION

Gippsland and Educational Technology

In areas such as Gippsland and its environs, there is a challenge to be met in the provision of educative services, including adult basic education, to enable members of the community to have adequate opportunity of access and participation, despite the vastness, expanse and in some parts, isolation.

At all levels in the delivery of education there has been attention given, and developments initiated to overcome the barriers which distance dictates. The implementation of educational technology *(see next page) has become an important factor.

It is identified in the summary report on adult basic education (D.F.E. 1989), that teleconferencing is used widely in country areas for tutor training, working with students, general information, and staff development.

In the report, it is pointed out that activity needs to be expanded and regions should endeavour to ensure that a pool of tutors and co-ordinators become adept at using teleconferencing when appropriate.

East Gippsland Community College of TAFE is one of the colleges which has prepared delivery of education in alternative modes.

Definition of Educational Technology

The definitive statement given by the British National Council for Educational Technology.

Stated that:

> "Educational Technology is the development, application and evaluation of systems, technology and aids to improve the process of human learning". (N.C.E.T. 1969)

The Australian Society for Education Technology used this definition, modified it slightly, and now has the following statement in its constitutional document:

> Educational Technology is "the design, application, evaluation and development of systems, methods and materials to improve the process of human learning".
>
> (ASET 1975)

Educational technology has been identified as a useful "umbrella" term encompassing and bringing together a range of associated subject areas.

1. Audio visual aids
2. Designing instructional materials
3. Computer applications
4. Distance learning/communications
5. Evaluating instructional materials
6. Data bases
7. Interactive video
8. Video cameras

(Educational Technology, 1989)

In an evaluation of Telematic delivery at East Gippsland Community College of TAFE, Pam Nixon (1989) identified positive factors which included:

- the interactive nature of the class
- the contact with a wide range of student opinion, experience and ideas
- immediate advice and assistance
- the opportunity to study a subject not otherwise available
- less digression from the lesson plan compared to a regular class, therefore more work achieved in class.

Telematic delivery and other developments in educational technology offer potential as a vehicle for enhancing opportunities for the participation of visually impaired persons.

Adult basic education courses are not in isolation in the community setting, but are an integral link in the hierarchy of educative frameworks.

At all levels in education, there is a recognition of the advantages of interlinks and co-operative functioning.

As part of its literacy strategy, the Federal Government has now chosen La Trobe University's School of Education and the Adult Education Faculty at Sydney's University of Technology to develop jointly a national co-ordinating agency for training adult literacy personnel - also known as CATALPA.

In "A Fair Chance For All" 1990, the Federal Government "encourages higher education institutions to work with local TAFE colleges to develop bridging courses that can be provided through TAFE, and linked to entry to higher education courses" and sets out that "Higher education institutions should also co-operate with TAFE to run local support programs for disadvantaged students who are doing external higher education courses".

Tafe colleges are continually expanding their role and collaboration and co-operation between institutes and learning centres is progressively developing, enhanced by the opportunities created by applications of technology.

Distance learning and education

In regions such as Gippsland, there is continuing progress in the use of technology in distance learning and education. The East Gippsland Community College of TAFE has developed links with Monash University, Gippsland.

A recent newspaper report detailed that in the Gippsland Region, "The school of applied science at Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education has been given a $240,000 Federal Government grant to evaluate the use of CD-ROM technology in distance and home education.

The study, to be carried out over two years, will be in collaboration with staff from Victoria's Monash University. The project will come under the auspices of the Monash-Gippsland National Distance Education Centre, which provides off-campus courses to the whole of Australia in a wide range of disciplines.

As well as the educational aspects of CD-ROM technology, the project will also closely study the economic aspects of using the technology for education.

Although at present a computer and a CD-ROM player would cost a student about $3,800.00, a principal lecturer indicated that this could be expected to drop, once CD-ROM technology made it into the home entertainment and education market".

At institutions such as Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, now Monash University, and Deakin University at Geelong and Warrnambool, courses have been developed which are available on the basis of off-campus studies or distance learning transcending regional boundaries.

Opportunities for "print handicapped" students have been incorporated in some of those courses offered.

For example, Deakin University, at Geelong and Warrnambool, offer a range of degree programs through external studies to print-handicapped applicants.

Programs such as these provide assistance to students who cannot read or hold a book with ease. People in this category include not only those with vision impairments, but also those who have physical disabilities which restrict ability to deal with printed pages, e.g. through muscular dystrophy or paraplegia.

In publications from Deakin University, Warrnambool, planning of the program is described thus:

> Print-handicapped students are integrated with other students of the external studies program of the Institute, the major difference being in the format of the standard subject study package.
>
> Students receive complete packages of study materials comprising prescribed texts, supplementary readings and study guides utilising the most appropriate combination of audio, large print and tactile materials for the particular student.
>
> Some students with limited vision will be able to write or type assignments. Others will require an electronic typewriter with a speech output, or microcomputer with a speech output and appropriate word processing software. Students will have access via their personal microcomputers with voice synthesiser and modem attachments to the mainframe computer for administrative contact and for assignment and examination assessment.
>
> Up to the point of preparing assignments or sitting examinations, the students will receive personal help through telephone and computer link-ups.
>
> This degree is promoted as a new program which allows students who are print handicapped as a result of visual impairment, dyslexia, quadriplegia or other difficulties, to achieve a higher level of education.

New technology is continually expanding and spreading into educational and vocational areas

It is important that in the implementation of initiatives, there is appropriate provision to ensure that individuals with visual impairment are not excluded. The $1 million Victorian State Government program "that will place computers in the extensive neighbourhood house and community learning centre network across the State", has been promoted as "being a boon for women, giving them access to information on courses and jobs through the 'Job and Course Explorer' program as well as an opportunity to learn computing skills". (Further Ed., Feb. 1990).

However there appears to be **no apparent planned provision for visually impaired adults** to gain access by appropriate resources such as voice synthesiser or large print screen access.

In current initiatives and new programs, there should be provision for access by visually impaired adults on an equitable basis with other members of the community.

A strategy could include planned provision made at designated regional centres as a first **initiative.**

Impact of new technology - from the perspective of a visually impaired person

In an examination of recent advances in technology and their benefits to visually impaired people, Derek Child in The British Journal of Visual Impairment, Spring 1990 (V111:1) describes **the impact of new technology from the perspective of a visually handicapped person** as follows:

Child (1990) terms the 'communications revolution' as "symbolising the dawning of what must be a new era for visually handicapped people, if you consider that the major problem for the visually impaired student or professional is equal and speedy access to information".

Child (1990) recognises that "in some respects the major communication disability which accompanies visual impairment could be minimised in the future, provided attention is paid to the social needs of different groups of users".

Child (1990) projects the view that "when we look at the place of new technology in the context of education and employment, it is rather difficult to generalise about its value unless one looks at specific applications designed to meet an individual user's needs - **technology only has relevance if it can meet an individual's needs".**

Child (1990) points out that "...**the advent of new technology with appropriate support has filled a vacuum...** Visually handicapped users of technology, like myself, do not wish to pursue some kind of technological excursion for its own sake ... but what we are most interested in is their application and use in everyday activity - a use that will enable us to keep in line with the technology that our peers are using to support their professional work".

Child (1990) recognises that **"keeping visually handicapped users with access to mainstream equipment is an essential component to the full exploitation of technical developments as they occur in the information technology field".**

Child (1990) reiterates that, "the importance of the use of sound to support screen-based information has already been recognised and this could have great potential spin-off benefits for those with special needs".

Videos need not be discounted for use by persons with visual impairment. Many visually impaired adults have residual or low vision, but when images cannot be sighted satisfactorily, it is significant to have exploratory description.

A register should be developed indicating videos and other educational resources available which feature appropriate verbal description for complete understanding and adequately complement the visual component.

Linked with the application of technology and distance learning, significant advances in the Eastern and Gippsland regions have been made in the development of outreach programs, linking of resources, and networking.

Adequate cognisance has not been taken of the fact that as a consequence, opportunities and choices can now exist to provide considerable benefit to persons with visual impairment, and enhance prospects of participation, which previously had not been feasible.

Features which have proved beneficial to other members of the community are **significant factors for persons with visual impairment.**

Factors that can be of particular benefit to adults with visual impairment include:

- the elimination of the necessity to travel
- flexibility in mode of delivery
- greater access to a wider range of resources
- exposure to a broad range of expertise
- choice of modes in the enactment of the exchange of information.

In the report **Adult Literacy and Basic Education into the 1990's Vol. 2 (1989)** it is pointed out that -

> "a variety of technology, ranging from basic tape recorders to elaborate integrated systems such as Mac-Fax-Duct has an important role to play in enhancing the quality and availability of adult basic education provision".

However, as Rhonda Galbally, Director of Commission for the Future in 1987, cautioned - "we must face the possibility that the expansion of information technologies in education could compound inequalities, not reduce them".

There has not been adequate cognisance of the fact that in educational environments applications of available technology has the potential to provide significant and exceptional opportunities for persons with visual impairment.

However, strategies have not been determined or implemented to ensure that in the applications of available technologies, opportunities are made available to **include persons with visual impairment** in a full participatory role on an equitable basis.

Developments in Technology

New technology which is useful to, and creating opportunities for visually impaired persons in education is developing significantly on three fronts. New technology to benefit individuals with visual impairment or blindness; applications for generic and community implementation; and advances in technology for distance education.

In the development of technology which is targeted and **specifically developed for the use of visually impaired and blind persons,** an example is the recently reported development of a New York computer printer that can translate letters and numbers into Braille characters and reproduce graphic images in relief, using standard office paper.

Software included with the printer translates the alphanumeric fonts on the keyboard to standard Braille fonts, and an optional program translates to Grade 2 Braille, which contracts common prefixes and suffixes for faster reading by the blind person. Standard personal computer graphics software can be used to create maps, graphs and drawings.

The Pixelmaster has the ability to print maps, charts, graphs or images and Braille fonts directly from a computer. Because the Pixelmaster prints alphanumeric characters along with Braille, it is expected to facilitate communication for sighted persons working with the blind.

Another recent example was featured in the PC Today News, July 1990:

"The Digital Daily Newspapers scheme from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, will give people in the U.K. access to the full text of daily papers rather than them having to wait for weekly extracts on cassette tape or from a friend to read them.

In a pilot scheme, the Guardian is being broadcast nationally over the independent television network by Air Call Teletext Ltd. It is transmitted on the day of publication and received in the blind person's home using a Screen Electronics decoder card in a personal computer".

There is continuous momentum throughout the work of the development of **technological applications for generic and community use** on areas such as industry, commerce and communications and education.

A recent report described the advance in **speech synthesis,** with the development of a computer chip by a team of researchers at Sydney University, that has been heralded as a big step toward replacing keyboards with voice commands.

And a voice-activated computer is described in Technology Update, SAF, October, 1989.

The **voice-activated computer** released by Transceptor Technologies, Michigan, is referred to as a "Communications System". At the unit's base is an IBM AT 286 clone with a 40 megabyte hard disk, 1 megabyte of RAM, and a 2400 baud modem.

There is no keyboard, no operating system or application programs for the user to load, and a monitor is optional. What the customer finds on unpacking the device for the first time is an approximately 25 pound box, measuring 16" high, 20" wide, and 18" deep with a microphone, a speaker, a phone cord, and a power cord. The Companion executes voice commands given by the user and "talk back".

High quality synthesisers have also been designed with voice coming from a single digital processor, and are promoted for use with **desktop computers and laptops.** A "touch tablet" that connects to the synthesiser responds to touch and is sued to hear each line spoken. **Speech access products** are described (Technology Update, Dec. 1990) as adaptable for the IBM compatible desktop and Toshiba laptop computers.

A report (Aust, 16th April, 1991) indicated that the State Library of N.S.W. and the University of Western Sydney Nepean are working to establish **Multimedia Library Link** designed to test the feasibility of sending sound, data text, and images from one library to another, using a standard ISDN telephone.

The system is described as "marrying the technologies of integrated services digital network (ISDN) and digital video interactive (DVI)", and it is anticipated that it will bring great benefits to many areas, including education providers.

Queensland's first multi-media R and D centre was reported (Aust, 12th March, 1991) as opening soon at Brisbane's Griffith University in July 1991, and aiming to develop **multi-media classroom projects incorporating computer software and hardware, video, audit and print materials.** Developments in technology now provide for sending sound, data, text, colour and images over long distance.

A global perspective which has implications for **long distance learning and collaborative teaching strategies** for the future is referred to in a report (Aust. 10/7/90) pertaining to the Ed Tech '90 Conference at Sydney. In reference to a speech by Dr. David Clark, descriptions and excerpts include the following:

Benefits to Long-distance Learning

> "Electronic books would also benefit long-distance learning and remote schools throughout Australia".

A **global perspective** was given in the report by (Aust. 17/7/90) in reference to the World Conference on Computers in Education (WCCE90) in Sydney.

It was reported that-

> Professor Longworth, who holds the UNESCO-IBM Chair in Education and Information Technology
>
> "is one of the main systems architects behind the use of **satellites** to deliver education and computer conferencing systems to leading universities in 100 locations throughout Europe".

The report indicated that he foresaw a global perspective of

> "existing possibilities in the future in such areas as distance learning, collaborative global teaching strategies and the creation of a range of open-ended software based on hypermedia tools".

The report described that Professor Longworth used examples to illustrate this from three existing programs-

> the European Commission Delta Program,
> the Pluto International Networking Program,
> and, finally, Euro-PACE Satellite Education Program.

Viability of transcending state boundaries in the delivery of education now exists.

In TAFE colleges in New South Wales there is considerable momentum in applications of technology.

Developments in the application of technology in TAFE colleges in N.S.W. are described in a report (Aust. 17/7/90) which indicates that TAFE's eventual goal is to create a statewide classroom communications network through TAFE-NET.

> "This would enable students in different TAFE colleges to communicate and share notes with each other via electronic mail and bulletin boards".

> "It would also make possible such events as classrooms teleconferences, whereby students anywhere in the State would be able to give input to discussions on particular topics".

It was also indicated that a desirable outcome in the future would be a single teacher broadcasting to a class spread throughout different parts of the State via TAFE-NET or by linking the network to other broadcasting media.

The advancements being made can offer potential and viability for visually impaired adults.

It is important for all the various applications in education to incorporate appropriate provision for visually impaired people to participate on an equitable basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

Recommendations and Strategies

Hartley (1990) points out that-

> "International Literacy Year will no doubt go some way towards increasing public awareness of literacy issues, but it will need to be followed up by more focused education campaigns".

It could be a remarkable and lasting legacy in a follow-on to International Literacy Year, if an educational program and awareness campaign was properly focused on the unique needs of visually impaired and blind persons with the objective of enhancing opportunities for maintenance of literacy skills in educational community environs.

Access to education at all levels including adult basic education should be available to people with disabilities on an equitable basis. Acknowledgment of this has resulted in efforts to improve opportunity of access and participation, properly directed to include all people with disabilities. However, the nature of blindness and visual impairment, whether experienced as the only serious disability or as one of multiple disabilities, requires specificity in responses to needs generated by the many facets of the condition.

In adult basic education and allied courses, attention should be directed to such areas as provision of opportunities for participation by adults with visual impairment, awareness promotion, appropriate flexibility of course delivery, adequate staff development and support, equitable accessibility to technology, and consideration given to perspectives of adults with visual impairment in all planned initiatives.

For optimal effectiveness, an appropriate strategy should specifically target the needs of blind and visually impaired adults.

Therefore, it is recommended:

Recommendation 1:

that the Division of Further Education devise effective strategies for enabling and promoting participation of persons with visual impairment and blindness in adult basic education and allied courses on an equitable basis.

In devising strategies for Recommendation 1, attention should be directed to:

Strategy 1: **Information for Educators in centres/colleges**

- distribution of publications which informs personnel in centres/colleges of the factors pertinent to meeting the needs of visually impaired persons in a learning environment.

- For this purpose, appropriate selection can be made from prepared information sheets and kit which accompany this report.

Strategy 2: **Access to Specialist advice**

- the provision of appropriate guidelines for personnel at centres and colleges to access specialist advice in the delivery of programs for visually impaired adults.

Strategy 3: **Large print format for information about and in courses/programs**

- guidelines, incentives and encouragement for educators/co-ordinators to re-examine the preparation and dissemination of information about and in courses offered in adult basic education and allied courses, with a view to the provision of a large print format being made available as a matter of course.

Strategy 4: **Audio format for information about courses/programs**

- the promotion of the preparation of information about courses in audio form, and the making available of that format at the same time as the information becomes available to other members of the community.

  This may entail the combining of resources and co-operation of organisations - for example, an arrangement with the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, or specialist agency, for assistance with the production of audio format, and cassettes being made available at local libraries, program venues, and usual sources of distribution.

- Options such as braille and disk should also be considered.

Strategy 5: **Delivery of programs**

- provision of programs which are sufficiently flexible in method and delivery to reasonably accommodate the requirements of visually impaired persons on an equitable basis.

Strategy 6: **Inter-agency collaboration and sharing of resources**

- the recognition of existing networks for each area and the promotion of inter-agency collaboration for optimisation of sharing resources and personnel to enable full participation by visually impaired adults on an equitable basis.
- foster and maintain links with regional libraries
- a register could be developed indicating videos and other educational resources with adequate description complementing the visual component.

Recommendation 2:

that the Division of Further Education devise effective strategies to ensure that there is access for visually impaired adults commensurate with other members of the community to available technology at venues of adult basic education and allied courses on an equitable basis.

In devising strategies for Recommendation 2, attention should be directed to:

Strategy 1: **Opportunity of New Technology**

- promotion of the significance of the use of appropriate technology to visually impaired adults

- awareness and promotion of new technology used in education and appropriate to visually impaired students

Strategy 2: **Optimising Participation in Technology**

- promote and plan opportunities for participation by adults with visual impairment in the use of computers. For example, the Job and Course Explorer system currently being introduced into community provider centres has been designed to meet the special needs of people seeking information on the education system and job opportunities. This system should also be accessible to visually impaired persons. A strategy should entail a systematic incorporation of appropriate software, large print accessibility, and/or voice synthesiser to provide access in each area.

- in each region maintain an awareness of the significance to visually impaired persons of particular technology as it is introduced into the community networks or educational environments. Developments such as laptops (now adaptable with speech access products, for example, Toshiba) and multi-media applications offer significant potential for participation by visually impaired persons.

Recommendation 3

that the Division of Further Education initially designate specific locations in each region to facilitate access and participation of adults with visual impairment. This could be a first step in a strategy for full provision in all localities.

Recommendation 4

that specific inclusion and equitable opportunity is ensured for visually impaired persons in proposed and current initiatives by the Division of Further Education.

In devising strategies for Recommendation 4 attention should be directed to the profile of visually impaired persons in such areas as-

- the development of statewide resource information service
- the development of curricula for basic education programs
- the co-ordination of professional development activities at regional and statewide level

- the support given to community providers of further education
- the maintenance of Return to Study/Return to Work Network
- the promotion of inter-agency co-operation
- liaison with agencies of the Ministry to ensure appropriate information/courses are available for adult educators
- the National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE

In the planning and implementation of any initiative a check question can be asked -

Are visually impaired persons
- included?
- excluded?

Any measures which are implemented to promote integration into educative environments need to be coupled with an awareness program outlining developing opportunities targeting visually impaired adults in the community, and in tandem with awareness strategies directed to educators.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

DISABILITY SERVICES ACT 1986
Commonwealth of Australia
Gazette June 9, 1987

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

Principles

(1) People with disabilities are individuals who have the inherent right for their human worth and dignity.

(2) People with disabilities, whatever the origin, nature, type and degree of disability, have the same basic human rights as other members of Australian society.

(3) People with disabilities, have the same rights as other members of Australian society to realise their individual capacities for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.

(4) People with disabilities have the same right as other members of Australian society to services which will support their attaining a reasonable quality of life.

(5) People with disabilities have the same right as other members of Australian society to participate in the decisions which affect their lives.

(6) People with disabilities receiving services have the same right as other members of Australian society to receive those services in a manner which results in the least restriction of their rights and opportunities.

(7) People with disabilities have the same right of pursuit of any grievance in relation to services as have other members of Australian society.

Objectives

(1) Services should have as their focus the achievement of positive outcomes for people with disabilities, such as increased independence, employment opportunities and integration into the community.

(2) Services should contribute to ensuring that the condition of the every-day life of people with disabilities are the same as, or as close as possible to, norms and patterns which are valued in the general community.

(3) Services should be provided as part of local co-ordinated service systems and be integrated with services generally available to members of the community, wherever possible.

(4) Services should be tailored to meet the individual needs and goals of the people with disabilities receiving those services.

(5) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to meet the needs of people with disabilities who experience a double disadvantage as a result of their sex, ethnic origin, or Aboriginality.

(6) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to promote recognition of the competence of, and enhance the image of, people with disabilities.

(7) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to promote the participation of people with disabilities in the life of the local community through maximum physical and social integration in that community.

(8) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to ensure that no single organisation providing services shall exercise control over all or most aspects of the life of a person with disabilities.

(9) Organisations providing services, whether those services are provided specifically to people with disabilities or generally to members of the community, should be accountable to those people with disabilities who use their services, the advocates of such people, the Commonwealth and the community generally for the provision of information from which the quality of their services can be judged.

(10) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to reach goals and enjoy lifestyles which are valued by the community generally and are appropriate to their chronological age.

(11) Services should be designed and administered so as to ensure that people with disabilities have access to advocacy support where necessary to ensure adequate participation in decision-making about the services they receive.

(12) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to ensure that appropriate avenues exist for people with disabilities to raise and have resolved any grievances about services.

(13) Services should be designed and administered so as to provide people with disabilities with, and encourage them to make use of, avenues for participating in the planning and operation of services which they receive and the Commonwealth and organisations should provide opportunities for consultation in relation to the development of major policy and program changes.

(14) Programs and services should be designed and administered so as to respect the rights of people with disabilities to privacy and confidentiality.

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